

Peach State CLC 2019 Fall Driving Tour – October 31 – November 3 2019

Thursday, October 31, 2019: *No Trick or Treaters for Peach State!* We're headed east for our annual Fall Driving Tour. It was cloudy, dark and chilly when we left home. One Cadillac every few minutes rolled into the hotel in Lithonia, east of the Perimeter. The staff were outside taking photos and asking questions. "Where is the car show?" This place has served before as our rally spot; it provided warmth, some breakfast, and a place to talk before a long first day of careening about. Everyone was on time, gassed up and ready to cruise. This group GETS it! Our caravan included all but the Greenes, the Johns, and the Butlers – who were meeting us on Hilton Head Island because they trailered their cars. We rolled eastbound in a long line on I-20 for over an hour toward the exit for Warrenton, making good time and waving to the Cadillac fans passing us slowly with thumbs up and eyes wide. The weather held. Barb was counting cars but behind me she could barely see around the massive chrome muzzle of that '51 Fleetwood. There they were - the veterans (Buster and Kim Miller, Eddie and Suzanne Bibb, Tom Di Nucci, Mark Nichols, Donald and Dollie Smalley) as well as those on their first Peach State tour. Although experienced tourers, Glenn and Debbie Novak ('92 Eldo) and Stephen Page ('02 Eldo) from Minnesota were with us for the first time. Lee and Hayden Wilson were on their first vintage Cadillac tour and they were lapping it up, enjoying every minute from the drivers; meeting to the gas stops. This leg was the last time all weekend that I felt comfortable about the lineup sticking together, because a line of nine Caddies seldom makes it through a traffic light. And that was *one long line*: a '66 Eldorado, '58 coupe, '51 Fleetwood, '61 convertible, '70 SDV, '76 Talisman, '77 Fleetwood, plus the "modern" cars. That's a ton of tailfins, taillights and tall tales!

At the exit all was well. Snaking across the hinterlands this Gaggles of Gadillacs made our way to the Ogeechee River Museum to visit Karl Fernandez, the curator of Alan and Judy Shapiro's car collection. All went to plan although we were a bit late. Everyone had a smile on their faces as we browsed this wonderful collection of high-quality restorations and survivors. Of particular note was the '41 Series 62 sedan that Alan had purchased from past member Ed Goehring. Also, the pink '59 CDV that Alan had been driving the day I met him in Athens at an invitational co-hosted by past VP Kevin Garrison. Below is a sampling of the show pieces in this collection. Barb loved the black '63 Bullet Bird with the red leather interior because, naturally, her pop had driven one. He was a car guy... Karl had kindly set us up with picnic tables and Tom laid out a feast of sandwiches, chips and cookies. Great road food! We left Karl with a nice pair of coffee table books on Cadillacs for him to share with Judy. (We could readily see our previous gifts displayed with loving care alongside the Cadillacs in the collection.)

A glitch! Mark's '76 Talisman was eating its own battery! We took the time to hunt down a jumper battery, and to clean up and tighten the terminals. We got the car started, but Mark could tell the issue wasn't the battery but a recalcitrant alternator. It wasn't charging the battery; running with the AC and headlamps on was drawing it down too fast. In order to keep the tour's pace, Buster and Kim stayed with Mark to find a replacement. I heard later that this was an adventure in rural southeast Georgia. Back on the road, we were running late and had to call the next stop to ask them to wait for us... Doug took the lineup off on a wild goose chase. He made a wrong turn and took us about five miles – ten round trip – out of our way. We were losing time while racking up the miles. But I have to say everyone was in good spirits. I was wondering if that would hold as we ran out of daylight later in the trip.

About 40 minutes up the road we stopped in downtown Harlem Georgia, hometown of Thirties movie star Oliver Hardy. Did you know that Hardy scanned the globe looking for a partner, and found Stan

Laurel in Great Britain? Stan took a steamer to the States and a lifetime partnership ensued. We visited a personal tribute to the boys completely created by hosts Gary and Jean, who immigrated to Georgia from Minnesota many years ago. Gary is the main modeler, a genius in woodworking. All these cars in the collection and most of the props and gizmos were handcrafted by Gary in his shop on the grounds. The couple was very gracious and friendly, and left us with a real desire to go back one day. (photos) We took a short ride downtown to visit the “official” Laurel and Hardy museum and welcome center. The new movie theater was running endless streams of some very funny stuff, but the place seemed a little sterile and humorless to me, compared with the genuine love for the comedians displayed across town at Gary and Jean’s. A quick stop for gas – again, people were lining up on the streets to gawk -- then we were back on the road, this time heading for Hilton Head Island.

The longest leg we’ve driven in a while. We ran along US 278 eastbound, then skirted the south side of Augusta, crossing the state line into South Carolina. We drove well over an hour on two-lane roads through the pulpwood farms and past the Savannah River Plant. Most of the cars we passed were sporting the green oval sticker that said “SRP,” employees of the biggest operation in miles and miles. We ran down past Hardeeville SC into the Low Country, swapping cotton fields for swamps and Spanish Moss-hung Live Oaks. (Stephen Page tells me that that frilly stuff hanging from the trees is neither Spanish nor moss...) As we crossed the river onto the island I was wishing we had left a bit earlier because nothing is darker than Hilton Head Island after dark. They don’t believe in street lights or well-marked street signs, and they toss in a tollbooth and a roundabout occasionally just to throw off your concentration. We bore left and took the shorter route to the hotel, costing us each \$1.25 in a toll.

It was 7:30 pm when we arrived to check into the Beach Front Resort hotel. I was still standing in the check-in line when Buster, Kim and Mark pulled under the portico. I was jealous because the black ’58 was gleaming under the lights and my car was buried out in the back under the trees... Despite some hassles locating a parts store with the right gear for Mark’s Fleetwood, they’d caught up with us just as we arrived at the end of the day’s drive! Everybody had a good check-in; the staff there are friendly and helpful. Thanks to Tom Di Nucci for negotiating a terrific \$119/night rate, and for talking them into dismissing the \$20 “beach access fee.” Most of us turned in early that night, worn out by the long drive. For the first and only time all trip I was thankful that Lewis Kelly wasn’t able to make this tour, because this would have been the time Lewis would be bugging me to tip the bottle of scotch with him! We missed you Lewis. Stone sober, I was fully appreciating that we had made it intact, even if there was the one troubleshooting event.

Friday, November 1, 2019: Friday was always planned to be a freewheeling day. We were up and at ‘em by 8:00 am, eating the hotel’s robust breakfast buffet. We split up afterwards. Barb and Kim and a couple of others stayed on the island to explore the beach and to shop at the many places near the hotel. Some had friends to visit in the area. Several of us piled into Bailey’s and Wilson’s cars and headed for the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Pooler GA. This was an hour’s drive from our hotel, but near to Savannah. The museum is a wonderful way to explore the air war over Europe, and the B-17 bomber and P-38 fighters provided a natural connection to our Cadillac roots. By now about everyone knows that the tail rig of a P-38 Lightning was the inspiration for Harley Earl’s rear quarter panel design flourish known now as the tailfin (starting with the 1948 models). I was able to secure a 1:48 scale model of a P-38, which was known to the Luftwaffe as the “forked tail devil” for its prowess at downing Messerschmitt and Fokke Wolfe fighters. The B-17 Flying Fortress was originally designed to use four Allison engines (designed by Cadillac) but these were soon replaced by the Rolls Royce Merlin engines

built in the States by Packard. The Merlins were capable of higher altitudes and more power, and both of those features saved American lives. Those of you who went with us to the Tuskegee Air Museum during the Fall of 2018 will recall that a single Merlin also powered the P-51 Mustangs that flew escort for these same armadas of B-17 Fortresses and B-24 Liberator bombers.

After we'd had our fill of the air museum we headed to downtown Savannah, braving what we'd heard was a daylong shutdown for a citywide marathon race. As it turned out, we were safe from the runners. We parked those two beasts on the street and held our breath that they would make it through lunch unscathed. We found a delightful place called "Prohibition," a modern day speakeasy. The most amazing 50-foot bar and music playing Big Band tunes. The backdrop was the same kind of flapper music that graces every movie you've seen about Elliott Ness and the FBI's machine gun wars on Chicago gangsters. We had lunch and vowed we would one day come back with designated drivers. The cars were still in place, having drawn no more than passing attention. Victory! By the time we got back to the hotel in mid-afternoon Buster was out near the beach washing his car. Patsy was gleaming. Drawing a lot of attention from the other guests – many of whom had spent the day on the beach and were now relaxing at the hotel's tiki bar. A car washing party broke out – everyone was helping us wash the road dirt and bugs off those cars! I heard Buster say that if you gotta wash a car there's no better way to do it than with friends while listening to a live band playing some tasty rock n roll.

That evening we headed to Frankie Bones, an elegant Italian dinner club in the style of the Rat Pack. It was less than ten minutes from our hotel, and once again we piled into a few cars. I heard Hayden and Lee raving about Tom's convertible and my riders were saying similar things. Nothing like a ride with the top down near the beach on a pleasant evening. Thanks for the reservations, Lori and Nicole! Tom's daughters fit right in with us. They had a room reserved, and the fare was wonderful. Fresh fish (I had the first real Chilean Sea Bass in years), pasta, lobster tails, crab cakes... Rob and Linda Johns joined us, along with Rob's brother Bill and his niece Lori. It was a legit par-tay. After dinner we posed as a group at the front entrance. (photo) We will be back, Frankie Bones!

Saturday, November 2, 2019: The BIG DAY! No time for breakfast, we departed in the dark at 7:00 am, rolling out by age of vehicle. Jeff and Alicia Greene were in the parking lot waiting for us, and they fell into line in their '68 coupe. We're OFF for the Car Club Showcase on Hilton Head Island's concours d'elegance, at the historic Port Royale Golf Course. I was nervous because (a) we had forgotten to pick up the packets with passes in them on Friday, (b) I had heard that the route we were told to use was going to be blocked this morning, and (c) I had a long line of Cadillacs trying to keep up in the dark with a route we weren't so sure of. No worries... gulp. I started off by making a wrong turn, circling a troupe of Caddies through the entrance to Van Der Meer's Tennis Academy – where the gate was guarded and the turnaround was tight. We made it. Whew! No one's cussing me out yet. A few hundred feet and the planned turn was... BLOCKED by cones and a cop! Dang! I sat in the car idling, glancing back at the old Cadillacs' headlights, until the cop approached. He directed us to another turn, which we made without further ado. But then, we arrived at our gate to find not only was there a line of vintage Mercedes blocking the road, but there was no one from the event at the gate! I made a command decision, and we turned into a work yard across the street, snaking our lineup around the dirt infield long enough to make a troubleshooting call. The Helpline answered! We were close! Another quarter mile and we found the registration gate, were assigned our packets, and were led onto the field. Finally I could relax...

Hilton Head Island concours never disappoints. Never. When we pulled onto the field the volunteer guides were very helpful and cheerful. We lined up by age, for the most part. Rob's brother Bill drove up in the '41 but was late for the lineup so he was on the younger end of the Cadillac lineup. No problem. We all got out and began wiping the dew and dust from our cars. Then we headed out for the complimentary breakfast buffet under the Exhibitors' tent. (photo) A quick waltz around the field to see the cars accumulating, and then back to Cadillac Central. We had so many visitors wanting to talk about our cars that we passed out about 40 club brochures and discussed mechanics and restoration approaches all morning. We did run into fellow CLC members and longtime friends, Jack McClow, Bob Norrid, Gary Fisher, Chris Hamann – all there from Potomac and Columbus regions to support the Butlers' entry on Sunday.

Mark and I were late getting to the lunch table, and by the time we had snarfed down a "BBQ" sandwich (grilled sausages?) it was nearly time for awards. When I got back to our cars I could see green ribbons on four cars: Rob's '41 convertible (his umpteenth), Buster's '58 coupe (his second), Donald's '77 Fleetwood (his first). And Eddie Bibb's '51 took a ribbon for longest distance driver this day. (photos) These cars joined the line of cars idling by to cruise past the judges' tent, and soon they were back clasping Crescent Awards. Congratulations, you all, you deserved it so much! Makes the planning and execution of this tour all so very worthwhile!

Soon after, it was approaching 4:00 pm. We were told that if we were smart we would get on the road before the place emptied out. We booked for the hotel, and all made it back safely. Several of the hotel's other guests stopped us in the parking lot, congratulating us for our ribbons. They were rooting for us and taking pictures of the gleeful champions! Sweet.

Our tour guides, Nicole and Lori again, took most of us to another local place, Backyard Seafood. We sat on the patio in a large group and chatted while we had another fine meal. Soon enough we were back on the hotel grounds getting rested or having a drink at the tiki lounge.

Sunday, November 3, 2019: Sleep in until 8:30! The fresh-fruit-and-eggs bar was less well attended. People were figuring out there were other places for breakfast. Buster and Kim were gone, already on the road. Plenty of our group stayed back and enjoyed a leisurely day at the beach. But most of us piled into a few cars and headed back to the *concours*. We parked at Hilton Head High School – talk about a decent place to go to school! The hosts were running shuttles from the school to the grounds, and that was a fun ride. Debarking, we found ourselves in the middle of the action, surrounded by some of the most beautiful automobiles ever created. Dazzled by a '31 V16 Cadillac, I could barely see the lineup of gorgeous Classics for the tears in my eyes. I can't describe what it's like to stroll among these artworks in steel and leather. It overwhelms your senses and leaves you dumbstruck. It's just too much for a puny human mind to envelope. Too much class, too much history, too much design brilliance, too much... (photos)

We found Martina and Frank Butler standing near Miss Blue, their stunning 1964 Eldorado. Martina's entourage had apparently slept in, because we didn't see Jack, Bob, Gary or Chris. I spoke briefly with Frank Butler Jr., who was on assignment for *The Self Starter*, taking photos and notes for an upcoming article on the *concours*. Miss Blue had received its BLUE RIBBON, Best in Class, just before I arrived, and all were in high spirits. Congrats, Missy Blue!

I joined a couple near one of the bar/concession stands, resting their feet like me. They were from Austin TX, and had been checking off the high end concours on their bucket list for many years. They regaled me with tales of Pebble Beach and Amelia Island, and we compared notes on the field at HHI. As it turned out, Ms. Longwood's daddy used to be a Cadillac salesperson. She was looking for a home for some of his memorabilia! So, I think we've made another connection. If you see some new swag at the Christmas banquet auction you will know where that came from. Eventually my bar table became crowded with other Peach State CLCers. It's a blast to compare notes on special vehicles you've discovered, and to recognize that dazzled look in the other car fans' eyes. Barb wandered over and asked me to take her picture with two late '50s Mercedes tourers. (photos) She was dropping big time hints about her birthday next summer... And with that, I realized "It's time to get outta here!"

The Smalleys had left earlier, to get a jump on that drive home. The Bibbs headed south to Florida, planning on a weekend with family there. Tom headed north toward Augusta, where he was invited to spend the next few days with the Di Nucci families. Stephen Page also headed north, seeking the long lost backroads Northwest passage to Minnesota. The Novaks stayed on the field to wring every last drop of concours out of that field. So, Mark, Lee and Hayden and the Baileys grabbed a shuttle bus back to the high school and our cars. We closed this tour together, running back up I-95 to I-16 and into the metro Atlanta area on I-75. It was an uneventful drive, unless you consider how fast we had to go to keep from getting run over. At 75 we were getting passed by little zipstreams of two-door Specs that turned out to be actual CARS once we could see them on the horizon. Amazing to watch those drivers in those matchboxes driving as if their plastic cocoons would protect them in a high speed crash. At any rate, there was only one panic stop if you don't count the overturned Toyota in the other lane north of Macon. And that one stop was okay, because the Green Giant actually DID stop when the guy tailgating me had to take the berm to escape flattening his front end on my rear bumper.

So chalk up another victory for Peach State Cadillac & LaSalle Club. We had an awesome long weekend, compiling 750 miles round trip in four days. Several of us hope to earn our Senior Touring badges with this leg of touring. We certainly hope YOU will join us for our next one, in the spring of 2020!

Doug Bailey